

Open Letter: Nature Restoration Law: a nature-positive renewable energy transition is the only sensible way forward

Dear esteemed Environment Ministers of the EU27,

We write to you today to urge you to expedite the approval of the Nature Restoration Law. REScoop.eu, the European Federation of Citizen Energy Cooperatives, represents over 2450 energy cooperatives from across Europe, in turn representing over 1.5 million EU citizens. Members of energy cooperatives implement local renewable energy projects, motivated by a need to protect their local environment, while also tackling the planetary issue of global heating. As highlighted in the Charter of REScoop.eu¹, energy communities develop and plan their projects with as little impact to the local environment as possible. At the same time, project revenues are partially reinvested to the benefit of local ecosystems, such as in local tree planting projects.

We envision a renewable energy transition where local economies thrive by enacting participatory renewable energy projects, in close harmony with local ecosystems. Lots of examples from across Europe, from agrivoltaics to renewable community funds for nature, demonstrate that the renewable energy transition goes hand-in-hand with the protection of natural ecosystems.

We thus strongly urge you to expedite the approval of the Nature Restoration Law, in order to protect European ecosystems, benefit local communities, and enhance the bloc's economy.

Background: a worrying backsliding for people and planet

On the 22nd of March 2024 the Belgian Presidency decided to postpone the Council vote on the Nature Restoration Law, in what was supposed to be a sign-off formality, on an already agreed piece of legislation. We are deeply worried about these developments, and urge you, the EU's environment ministers, to move forward with the Law as quickly as possible. Any additional delay:

- **Risks derailing the EU's energy transition:** as Member States are currently drafting up Renewable and Net Zero Acceleration Areas, it would only make sense that these are developed in close synergy with National Restoration Plans, so as to identify the most/least biodiverse and ecologically sensitive areas. This clear demarcation of "no go" areas would lead to higher confidence for project developers, and less disputes

¹ https://www.rescoop.eu/uploads/REScoopEU_Charter.pdf

with local communities, thus helping to significantly accelerate a nature-positive, renewable energy transition.

- **Further jeopardizes the EU's economy.** The European Environment Agency warns that the bloc is set to incur 1 trillion euros in climate damages by the end of the century, while highlighting that healthy and restored ecosystems are essential to building resilience². Meanwhile, over 80% of the EU's habitats are classified as in 'poor condition' due to human pressures, like intensive farming and urban sprawl.
- **Erodes public trust in the policy-making process,** at a time when democratic institutions are already increasingly being challenged by authoritarian right wing voices.

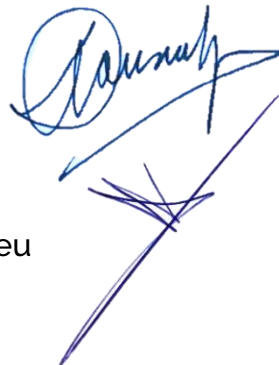
Just a few examples from within the REScoop.eu network which highlight that a **nature-positive, (community-based) renewable energy transition is possible:**

- **CommonEn is creating the first urban community agri-voltaic project in Greece³:** an urban vegetable garden that will be combined with the production of clean energy from special photovoltaic panels.
- **The Dutch cooperative Goed Veur Mekare is promoting the 'energy garden concept'⁴:** renewable energy combined with indigenous biodiversity, and space for leisure and social interaction
- **The energy gardens concept is now being replicated in Germany:** BürgerEnergie Thüringen, the federation of energy cooperatives in Thuringia is working with stakeholders, such as the regional energy and environment ministry, to implement the strategy.

In conclusion, as REScoop.eu together with its members and broader supporters of the community-energy movement, **call for the swift and full adoption of the Nature Restoration Law.** Its implementation, in synergy with the REPowerEU strategy, can ensure a nature-positive, community-inclusive, fast renewable energy transition.

With cooperative regards,

Dirk Vansintjan, president REScoop.eu



Nuri Palmada, vice-president REScoop.eu

² <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/european-climate-risk-assessment>

³ <https://electraenergy.coop/communitysolargarden/>

⁴ <https://www.rescoop.eu/news-and-events/stories/february-success-story-harvesting-energy-hand-in-hand-with-nature-and-citizens>